

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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R 162248Z MAY 75

FM AMEMBASSY PANAMA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 3934

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SUBJ: TORRIJOS REASSURES CANAL ZONE WORKERS AND EXPRESSED
OPTIMISM ON NEGOTIATIONS

REF: PANAMA 2730

SUMMARY: GENERAL TORRIJOS MET MAY 14 WITH 15 REPRESENTATIVES
OF LATIN AMERICAN CIVIC COUNCILS AND PANAMANIAN LABOR UNIONS
IN CANAL ZONE TO ASSURE THEM THAT THEY WOULD NOT SUFFER
WHEN THE NEW TREATY COMES INTO EFFECT. HE TOLD THEM THEY
WOULD BE CONSULTED ABOUT THE INTEGRATION OF PANAMANIAN INTO
POSITIONS IN CANAL ADMINISTRATION. TORRIJOS, SAYING THE
U.S. WAS NEGOTIATING IN GOOD FAITH, PROMISED THAT THE
"INJUSTICES" FOR PANAMANIAN EMPLOYEES WHICH HAD RESULTED
FROM PAST U.S.-PANAMANIAN AGREEMENTS WOULD NOT BE REPEATED.
TORRIJOS SAID

THAT THERE WERE INDICATIONS THAT A TREATY
WOULD BE SIGNED THIS YEAR, BUT THAT ITS RATIFICATION MIGHT
BE DELAYED. AS TO THOSE PANAMANIAN WHO MIGHT LOSE THEIR
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JOBS WITH THE REDUCTION OF THE US MILITARY PRESENCE, TORRIJOS

SAID THAT THERE WERE PLANS WHICH WOULD PROVIDE JOBS FOR "MANY OF YOU." A ZONE LABOR LEADER STATED HIS CONFIDENCE IN THE GOVERNMENT'S DEFENSE OF PANAMANIAN LABOR'S "CONQUESTS" IN THE ZONE AND EXPRESSED OPPOSITION TO ANY POSSIBLE UNION OF PANAMANIAN WITH NORTH AMERICANS "AGAINST THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE." A LABOR LEADER LATER TOLD EMBOFFS THAT TORRIJOS ALSO SAID PANAMANIAN LABOR CODE WOULD NOT BE APPLIED TO CANAL ENTITY UNDER NEW TREATY, PANAMANIAN IN ZONE SHOULD NOT GET INTO FIGHTS WITH US CANAL EMPLOYEES EVEN IF PROVOKED, AND CANAL EMPLOYEES SHOULD HAVE THE RIGHT TO PURCHASE THE HOUSES THEY LIVE IN. END SUMMARY

1. TORRIJOS MET THURSDAY MORNING WITH 15 CANAL ZONE PANAMANIAN LEADERS AT THE HOME OF HIS BUSINESSMAN ADVISER AND CONFIDANT, RORY GONZALEZ, IN PANAMA CITY. THE MEETING WENT HARMONIOUSLY WITH TORRIJOS EXPRESSING HIS VIEWS AND ENCOURAGING QUESTIONS FROM THE GROUP. AS DESCRIBED REFTEL, THE MEETING HAD BEEN ARRANGED BY DEAN BUTCHER, THE SECRETARY GENERAL OF THE AIFLD-SUPPORTED CTRP NATIONAL LABOR CONFEDERATION, AND INCLUDED REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE LATIN AMERICAN CIVIC COUNCILS AND OF THE THREE LARGEST PREDOMINANTLY PANAMANIAN-CITIZEN LABOR UNIONS IN THE ZONE, THE NATIONAL MARITIME UNION AND LOCALS 900 AND 907 OF THE AMERICAN FEDERATION OF STATE, COUNTY AND MUNICIPAL EMPLOYEES (AFSCME). BUTCHER IS A PAST PRESIDENT OF LOCAL 907 AND PRESENTLY AN EQUAL EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITY COORDINATOR WITH THE U.S. ARMY.

2. TO RIJOS ASSURED THE REPRESENTATIVES THAT THE GOP IS INTERESTED IN THEIR WELFARE AND PRAISED THEM, SAYING, "WITH YOUR HELP I EXPECT THAT WE ARE GOING TO IMPROVE UPON THE PRESENT CANAL OPERATION, WHICH WE HAVE TO RECOGNIZE IS VERY GOOD." HE PROMISED TO CONSULT WITH THEM WHEN THE TIME ARRIVES TO MAKE DECISIONS ABOUT INCREASING THE NUMBER OF PANAMANIAN IN CANAL OPERATIONS. HE SLID OFF A QUESTION AS TO WHETHER COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WOULD BE PERMITTED UNDER A NEW TREATY BY SAYING: "I COULD NOT PROMISE WHAT I CANNOT OBTAIN IN THIS FIGHT. YOU MUST WORK TOGETHER IN ORDER TO WIN THESE GAINS." ASKED WHETHER LABOR WOULD PARTICIPATE IN THE NEW RELATIONSHIP, TORRIJOS REPLIED, "WE HAVE NOT REACHED THAT STAGE OF THE NEGOTIATIONS YET, BUT YOU WILL BE LISTENED TO WHEN WE REACH THAT STAGE."

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3. REFERRING TO U.S. CITIZENS NOW EMPLOYED IN THE CANAL ZONE, TORRIJOS SAID THAT THERE ARE MANY WHO WORK IN GOOD FAITH AND IF THEY SHOULD WISH TO "LIVE AMONG US" THEY WILL BE WELL-RECEIVED. "ALL THE PEOPLE WHO WORK AND LIVE IN THE CANAL ZONE AT PRESENT SHOULD HAVE THEIR GAINS RESPECTED, NOT PRIVILEGES--THIS LATTER WORD IS ODIUS--THEY SHOULD SURELY BE ENTITLED TO THEIR GAINS AND JUST RIGHTS," TORRIJOS EMPHASIZED.

4. CONCERNING THE NEGOTIATION, TORRIJOS SAID, "I BELIEVE THAT TODAY IS DIFFERENT FROM THE PAST. TODAY THE NORTH AMERICANS ARE ACTING IN GOOD FAITH AND THE INJUSTICES WHICH YOU HAVE POINTED OUT AND WHICH AFFECTED THE PANAMANIAN WORKERS IN THOSE AGREEMENTS, AS THE SO-CALLED TREATY OF 1955, WILL NOT BE REPEATED." DETAILS OF THE NEGOTIATIONS-- "BECAUSE OF THEIR INTERNATIONAL NATURE"-- REQUIRED THE "MAXIMUM DEGREE OF DISCRETION." HE ADDED: "I MYSELF DO NOT KNOW WHAT THE FINAL (RESULT) WILL BE." HE TOLD THE LABOR LEADERS THAT THERE WERE MANY INDICATIONS THE TREATY WOULD BE SIGNED THIS YEAR. HE ASSERTED THAT HE WANTED, ABOVE ALL, SIGNING OF THE TREATY WHEREAS "RATIFICATION OF THE TREATY IS ANOTHER ASPECT FOR WHICH FOR VARIOUS REASONS WE WILL HAVE TO WAIT."

5. ONE LABOR SPOKESMAN WAS QUOTED AS TELLING THE GENERAL THAT THEY HAD COME TO HIM WITH SOME DOUBTS AND UNCERTAINTIES BUT WERE LEAVING CONVINCED OF THE GOVERNMENT'S SUPPORT. THE SPOKESMAN TOLD THE GENERAL THAT THE ALLEGATIONS WHICH HAD BEEN MADE RECENTLY IN THE PANAMANIAN PRESS THAT PANAMAMANIANS (IN THE ZONE) ARE UNITING WITH THE NORTH AMERICANS IN OPPOSITION TO THE PANAMANIAN CAUSE WERE NOT TRUE.

6. THREE GOVERNMENT-CONTROLLED NEWSPAPERS HAVE CARRIED REPORTS OF THE MEETING UNDER THE HEADLINES "WE ARE FOR PANAMANIAN SOVEREIGNTY AND NOT WITH THE GRINGOS" (EL PANAMA AMERICA, MAY 14), "YOU REPRESENT THE FORCE OF 15,000 PANAMANIANS WHICH WILL BE CONSULTED WHEN THE TIME COMES TO MAKE THE DECISIONS, TORRIJOS" (MATUTINO, SECOND SECTION, MAY 15), AND "CZ WORKERS SUPPORT PANAMA TREATY STAND" IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE THE PANAMA AMERICAN.

7. THE GENERAL ALSO INFORMED THOSE PRESENT THAT HE HAD ASKED BUTCHER TO ARRANGE FOR THE GOP TO OFFER ENGLISH-LANGUAGE PROGRAMS LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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DAILY IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN CONTACT WITH THOSE PANAMANIANS WHO DO NOT UNDERSTAND SPANISH. THE IDEA, AS BUTCHER HAS EXPLAINED TO AN EMBASSY OFFICER, IS TO LEASE THREE HOURS DAILY (A NEW

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ACTION ARA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SAB-01 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-02

INR-07 L-02 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 COME-00 EB-07 LAB-04 SIL-01 TRSE-00 OMB-01

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LAW REQUIRES EACH RADIO STATION TO OFFER THE GOVERNMENT ONE HOUR DAILY OF PROGRAMMING) FROM RADIO HOG, AN ENGLISH-LANGUAGE STATION WHICH SPECIALIZES IN FUNDAMENTALIST RELIGIOUS BROADCASTING. PROGRAMMING WOULD PARALLEL THAT OF THE GOVERNMENT'S RADIO LIBERTAD BUT WOULD NOT COME UNDER ITS CONTROL.

8. DURING A VISIT TO EMBASSY, BUTCHER TOLD EMBOFFS THE PANAMANIAN FROM THE CANAL ZONE APPEARED TO BE PLEASED WITH THE MEETING AND RELIEVED AT WHAT THEY HAD HEARD FROM TORRIJOS. THEY LIKED ESPECIALLY HIS ASSERTION THEY WOULD BE CONSULTED AND THEIR VIEWS TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN THE NEGOTIATORS WERE DISCUSSING LABOR MATTERS. BUTCHER ALSO TOLD US THAT TORRIJOS HAD SAID PANAMANIAN LABOR CODE WOULD NOT APPLY IN THE CANAL ZONE. INSTEAD, SPECIAL LEGISLATION SUCH AS WAS PROVIDED FOR INTEL WOULD BE PASSED IN ACCORDANCE WITH TREATY PROVISIONS. ACCORDING TO BUTCHER, TORRIJOS URGED THE CANAL ZONE LEADERS TO AVOID ANTAGONIZING AMERICANS IN THE ZONE. THEY SHOULD AVOID FIGHTS EVEN IF PROVOKED. HE THEN SAID THAT SOME ELEMENTS IN THE CANAL ZONE WERE TRYING TO PROVOKE PANAMA AND CITED AS EXAMPLES THE DESTRUCTION OF THE WALL AT OLD FRANCE FIELD AND THE DETENTION BY U.S. POLICE OF A GN PATROL CAR WHICH HE SAID WAS EN ROUTE TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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OLD FRANCE FIELD. TORRIJOS ALSO TOLD THEM THAT SOME PANAMANIAN, INCLUDING CERTAIN NEWSMEN, WERE AROUSING PANAMANIAN SENTIMENTS AGAINST THE U.S. AND PANAMANIAN CITIZENS IN THE CANAL ZONE. HE SAID HE WOULD KEEP A CLOSE WATCH TO DISCOVER WHICH INDIVIDUALS WERE INVOLVED AND WOULD TAKE APPROPRIATE MEASURES AGAINST THEM. HE PROMISED TO TALK TO MERMELINDA FUENTES ABOUT HER STATEMENT

(MAY 13 EL PANAMA AMERICA) ACCUSING SOME PANAMANIAN IN THE ZONE OF WORKING AGAINST PANAMA'S INTERESTS. CONCERNING CZ HOUSING TORRIJOS SAID EMPLOYEES SHOULD HAVE FIRST OPTION ON BUYING THE HOUSES THEY ARE NOW LIVING IN AND SHOULD GET FINANCIAL HELP IN DOING SO. TORRIJOS SAID THAT UNDER A NEW TREATY THE POLICE IN THE CANAL AREA WOULD BE SPECIALLY QUALIFIED AND WOULD RECEIVE HIGHER PAY THAN DO ORDINARY GN POLICE.

9. COMMENT: TORRIJOS' MEETING WITH PANAMANIAN LABOR AND CIVIC COUNCIL LEADERS OF CANAL ZONE INDICATES HIS CONCERN OVER REPORTS OF INCREASING TENSION AND UNCERTAINTY AMONG CANAL ZONE RESIDENTS. HE COMMENTS TO THEM WERE MODERATE AND SHOULD BE HELPFUL IN CALMING DOWN FEARS. HIS REMARKS ABOUT PROVOCATIONS FROM U.S. ZONE RESIDENTS AND MILITARY REFLECT THE SUSPICION PANAMANIAN HAVE THAT SOME PEOPLE IN ZONE MIGHT TRY TO CREATE INCIDENTS WHICH IMPEDE THE NEGOTIATIONS. IT IS REFRESHING THAT HE APPEARS TO BE AWARE THAT SOME PANAMANIAN MIGHT ALSO SEEK TO DISRUPT GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES.
JORDEN

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